An Artist of the Films

By JOHN B. WALLACE

WHEN Alvin Wyckoff came into the world his parents—as do all parents—began planning his future. They decided that he would be a surgeon and began dreaming dreams of their boy at the head of a great hospital with other surgeons sitting humbly at his feet and drinking in the words of the master.

Destiny laughs at the air castles of parents. The heir of the Wyckoffs did indeed achieve supremacy but it was along a line little dreamed of in those days. Alvin Wyckoff today, as director of photography at one of the greatest of the many California studios, stands at the head of another profession, a profession which he has probably done more than any other man to elevate to an art.

ALVIN WYCKOFF

Wyckoff, himself, thought he was going to be a surgeon. When he entered the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor he picked the course that would lead to the profession of medicine. One day in an operating room caused him to change his mind. Right then and there he decided that surgery was not for him.

He finished his college course and turned his attention toward the stage, college dramatics having claimed his interest. As director, stage manager and leading man in stock he was fairly successful. At one time he had two companies of his own on the road and while his name was never emblazoned among the bright lights on Broadway he was not unknown in the smaller cities of the East.

But Wyckoff was not satisfied. He felt that his talents lay in other channels than acting. Motion pictures were just coming into popularity and one night after viewing a film he suddenly decided that there lay a field built to order for him. He wrote to the head of a company in Chicago and ten days later was acting comedy parts and later leads before the camera.

However, this was not the angle of the motion picture game in which he was most interested. Amateur photography had always been his hobby and the laboratories at the studio held a strange fascination for him. In those days actors were not allowed in the laboratories at all but Wyckoff sneaked in at every opportunity.

"I'll bet they kicked me out a dozen times a day," he told me.

Finally his persistence was rewarded. He was given a chance to learn the camera end of the motion picture business. He had majored in chemistry at college so film development held no difficulties for him. For ten days he ground away at an empty camera learning to turn the crank steadily, evenly, with no jerks. Then he was put to work taking apart and reassembling cameras. The company built its own cameras in those days and its men had to be expert in both building and repairing as well as operating.

The first picture that Wyckoff was given a chance to shoot was "The Wizard of Oz." He worked on that series for a time when his great opportunity came in the Jeffries and Johnson fight at Reno. All of the experienced men were busy at the time and there was no one to send but Wyckoff.

The tyro made good with a vengeance. He arrived at Reno and before any of his rivals were up the morning of the fight he had erected his stand. As a result he had the choice location. As soon as the fight was over he boarded a train for New York and was the first one to arrive with his film. Notwithstanding that his competitors were some of the best camera men in the country his work was adjudged the best and was accepted. That made him as a camera man. Not long after he left Chicago for Los Angeles.

Among his great pictures are "Joan of Arc," "The Count of Monte Christo," and Rex Beach's "The Spoilers."

Mr. Wyckoff is a chunky-built man of medium height with a dynamic energy, an energy almost Rooseveltian. He has the outstanding personality that would enable one to pick him in any group of men as being somebody. I found him in his quarters, quarters which oddly remind one of a ship with its various decks and brass-railed companionways leading to them. Here light is king and the rays of the California sun pouring through the roof of glass are reinforced by powerful spotlights.

From the bridge of this large structure—further to pursue the nautical simile—Mr. Wyckoff directs his staff of twenty-six photographers. They are practically all men whom he himself has trained. He will accept no applicants unless they have a college or at least a high school diploma. He feels that photography is a profession very closely allied to the arts and he wants only men by whom it will be dignified.

The successful camera man must not only be possessed with an artistic sense but he must be a man of resourcefulness and cool daring. He must be a quick thinker who will act instinctively in moments of emergency. In addition he also must be a man of considerable agility, capable of almost acrobatic feats. Camera men are called upon to take pictures from airplanes, from the tops and sides of moving trains and automobiles, suspended by ropes from the sides of buildings and the masts of ships, in fact from every conceivable angle and perilous position that the requirements of the story they are filming may demand. It is no job for a nervous person or one who cannot stand altitudes.

The camera must always come first. That is the creed of the motion picture photographer. No matter what happens he must keep on turning. As the newspaper reporter's motto is "Get the Story" so the camera man's is "Get the Picture."

Notwithstanding the tremendous strides made in the pictures during the past decade, Mr. Wyckoff believes that as far as the photography end is concerned development has barely started. Wonderful improvement has been made in the mechanism of the camera but there are still vast opportunities for the inventor. Lenses, too, are far from perfect, Mr. Wyckoff says, only one out of twelve of any of the best makes being suitable for good picture work. In still photography it has been possible to achieve marvelous effects by doctoring the negative, but because of the enormous number of prints this is impractical with motion picture films.

"Any improvements from now on will be made inside the camera," Mr. Wyckoff predicted. "Competition is the great incentive for improvement in motion picture photography. As soon as something new is noticed on the screen by other photographers they at once set out to learn how this effect was obtained. In learning the secret they invariably improve upon the original idea. That again puts it up to the man who invented the device to think up something better and so on in an endless chain."

Mr. Wyckoff does not believe in repressing the individuality of his men.

"I encourage originality and initiative," he said. "If a man can get results through using a piece of window glass for a lens that is up to him. He is judged finally and conclusively by what is shown on the screen in the projecting room."

Invented Wireless Before Marconi Was Born

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purposes, relying upon the disturbance produced in the two electro-opposite bodies (of the earth and atmosphere) by an interruption of the continuity of one of the conductors from the electrical body being indicated upon its opposite or corresponding terminus, and thus producing a circuit or communication between the two without an artificial battery or the further use of wires or cables to connect the co-operating stations.

"Mahlon Loomis."

At odd intervals from early manhood until a short time before his death in 1886, Dr. Loomis kept a diary wherein he poured out his thoughts on various subjects.

The following quotation from his diary proves that Dr. Loomis was a believer in wireless telegraphy as far back as 1858:

"Washington, D. C., February 20, 1864. I got this little book today that I may collect and put together some papers and ideas that I have had for a long time upon the subject of electricity, and more particularly as that element is connected with telegraphy.

"I have been for years trying to study out a process by which telegraphic communications may be made across the ocean without any wires, and also from point to point on the earth, dispensing with wires. And the grand feature which I have hoped would characterize the plan is that the electricity (or electro-magnetism—the element or power used) would be drawn from the atmosphere, and not produced by artificial or mechanical means. To use that which nature seems to have already produced and keeps constantly on hand in such immense quantities.

"The lightning with its thunder crash seems to be the most powerful and terrible thing in nature. There always seems to be an abundance of this electrical element; and why not use it for various purposes?

"Franklin certainly did draw down electric fluid from the clouds; why not make another draft? By the perfection of appliances there is no doubt in my mind that a constant and never-failing current may be obtained powerful enough to telegraph across the ocean, to decompose water for light (or use the electric current itself for light and for various mechanical purposes). And to this end I wish to write down some facts and ideas, hoping to add more and go further until successful experiments are made and the reality of this dream come to pass.

"In 1858, August 15, I wrote a little paper, which I shall transcribe here: I believe as soon as something can be found to bear the same relation to the earth that a wire does, a telegraphic communication can be made without a wire. What relation does a wire bear to the earth? That is a question to be settled, and one which I must write more about at another time; but it serves to conduct a distinct portion of fluid from point to point, and so on.

"A subdued form of statical electricity may be used for telegraphic purposes. Dynamic and electro-magnetic fluids are both used, but both are chemically or mechanically made. Statical fluid resides abundantly in the atmosphere, and then a structure—say, of points—placed in the air at perhaps cloud height, if of sufficient amplitude, would be a never-failing source of an abundant current. This, then, may supersede the use of galvanic batteries for dynamic and electro-magnetic machines for electro-magnetism; and a great abundance always obtained without any expense but for the original structure.

"As water, especially salt water, and particularly a current of warm salt water, is a good conducting medium, a powerful current of atmospheric electricity may be made to traverse such a path from shore to shore of the Atlantic Ocean.

"The collecting apparatus, or points, may be stationed on the mountains to save building high structures, and thence conveyed on wires to the point of immediate use. And all along this conducting wire the fluid may be taken out and used for telegraphing and reinterred for further purposes. I am confident that some simple apparatus can be devised by which the atmospheric electricity can be collected."

The reader should not overlook the fact that the above ideas concerning wireless telegraphy were written by Dr. Loomis exactly sixteen years before Mr. Marconi was born in Bologna, Italy, April 25, 1874.

Caring for the Affairs of Jugo-Slavia

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directed the attention of your lumber industry to the fine market for their products in ancient Hellenes. But why ship your lumber thousands of miles, when you can take your equipment and skill to Jugo-Slavia, just north of Greece, and find all the timber you can handle?

"When our wars began there were only about 10,000 men of college and university training in all Serbia. They necessarily had to take the lead in the war, and are now almost gone.

"We have the labor, the native intelligence, waterways and some railroads, but we haven't the educated skill needed for leadership in developing our great natural resources.

"There is great opportunity in Jugo-Slavia for enterprising Americans."

Many Serbians and other southern Slavs who have lived in America have returned to Jugo-Slavia. In one month recently more than 50,000 passports were asked for by persons desiring to return to that country. But because of failure of industry to revive there as rapidly as was expected southern Slavs are beginning again to emigrate to this country.

The Jugo-Slav legation in Washington is anxious to inform interested persons regarding its country and the opportunities there for trade and industry.

Dr. Slavko Y. Grouitch, the minister in charge, is a man of extensive diplomatic experience. He has perfect command of the English language. He was assistant secretary of state for Serbia during the exciting days of July, 1914, when the fate of the world seemed to, and perhaps did, hang on the notes that passed between the Serbian and the Austrian foreign offices over the incident at Sarajevo. Dr. Grouitch handled the details of the Serbian end of the controversy, perhaps the most important diplomatic discussion that ever took place.

He later had charge of Serbian affairs in Switzerland, being transferred to America early in 1919.

Madame Grouitch is an American woman. She was Miss Mabel Gordon Dunlap, of Clarksburg, West Virginia, when she married Dr. Grouitch. They met and were married abroad when she was studying archeology at Athens, Greece.

The business of the Washington legation is conducted in offices set up in an apartment house near Dupont Circle. The Minister and Madame Grouitch maintain a residence elsewhere in the city.

"It is difficult to avoid superlatives in any description of Serbia," says J. Rives Childs who assisted Herbert Hoover in relieving the distress existing there following the war. "Those who have come away from Serbia after but a few weeks' acquaintance with the country and its people unite with those who have spent long years there in enthusiastic praise of the country and its institutions."